

TRENDWATCH: MANAGERS, MISSIONS, AND MILE MARKERS

We often think of trends in the future state, but there are current trends today worth noting: Road rage, air rage, express lane rage, sports rage, and now desk rage. As "rage" becomes all the rage, perhaps you agree that people don't seem as nice as they used to be. At home, at work, and in between, they are impatient, easily irritated, demanding, or downright rude. They don't want to wait, they don't want to cooperate, they don't want to be inconvenienced by anyone or anything. They want their way and they want it now! The problem is easy to spot but hard to stop. **Never have so many, with so much, been so unhappy!**

From coast to coast, in rural areas and big cities alike; people are chronically busy, trying to move faster, achieve more, accumulate more, do more with less. **Rising costs of doing business, global competition, and market uncertainty drive ongoing attempts to expand system capacity while reducing the investment (better-faster-cheaper). Further complications include limited resources and a reduced work force.** No wonder you find yourself playing "catch up" in a complex game where someone keeps changing the rules!

Given this backdrop, it's easy to understand why so many of us are experiencing so much stress, yet it's tempting to dismiss our symptoms because there's no time to address the possible cause. We too often allow workplace and personal conflicts to go unaddressed because of lack of time. **In fact, we barely have time to process what's happening now, let alone what went on yesterday.**

The question is not "have you been infected" by the anger epidemic, the question is "to what extent have you been infected?" Given our challenging cultural climate that shows few signs of mellowing, how can you resist the pressures of ten social forces that are complicating your life? **Be prepared to move beyond the old practice of time management: you are entering the era of "choice management"!** Making this mental shift will help you exercise more control over what you do, when, with whom, and why, including projects you may have to prioritize, put on hold, or even pass on, in your management role.

Are you risking your health or well-being from trying to keep pace with a world that refuses to slow down? Are you trying to do your best in the midst of morale issues, internal conflict, personal distress, or professional overload? Are you easing your stress load or adding to it? Or are you too overwhelmed to care? Let's look at how you and your work team are being affected, personally and professionally, by the ten trends outlined in *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?*

COMPRESSED TIME • COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD
dis-CONNECTEDNESS • COST • COMPETITION
CUSTOMER CONTACT • COMPUTERS • CHANGE
COMING OF AGE • COMPLEXITY

From *STICK TO IT!*:

"It's one thing
to list your priorities;
it's quite another
to live by them.
—Leslie Charles

From
**WHY IS EVERYONE
SO CRANKY?**

"In my twenty years as a workplace consultant I've met a multitude of wounded, hurting people; far more than I could have imagined. Of course, emotional injuries are less obvious than physical ones, but the symptoms are clear: they show up as a lack of enthusiasm, high stress, poor health, negative attitude, a lack of team spirit, resistance to change, low pride in work, and conflicted relationships, to name a few."

THE TEN TRENDS: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This book came about after years of listening to countless people express their ever-increasing levels of stress and conflict in their personal and professional lives. In my attempts to help organizations and the people in them reconcile the pressures and paradoxes we are living with today, I've developed my own perspective about leadership, change, organizational vitality, and personal development. The following statements represent my philosophy and values around initiating and sustaining organizational and personal change.

- We often try to achieve organization transformation from the outside in, by reorganizing, redeploying, re-designing, and reengineering the workplace. All of these steps are often necessary; even essential, but they are not enough. Organizational transformation requires an "inside out" approach. That is, lasting change comes from the inside out; through its people.
- If all employees are willing to pursue ongoing development; if they are willing to relentlessly and tirelessly explore and expand their capabilities; to perceive their life as if it's a very special project, the organization will have to change.
- If all managers are willing to pursue their ongoing development; if they are willing to relentlessly and tirelessly explore and expand their capabilities; to pursue leadership and personal transformation as if it's a very special project, the organization will have to change.
- Transformative leadership requires transformative thinking. It requires a personal vision, mission and values. It requires "walking the talk," because people respond more to actions than they do words. You set the direction.
- Self-improvement is a never-ending process requiring the assiduous application of personal resources: awareness, self-monitoring, ongoing practice and course correcting. It requires the same limitless thinking you put into your work projects. It requires exploring and expanding your "inner space."
- Personal transformation can be threatening. Some people resist change by escaping into their fear, insecurity, blame, or greed. Decisions and actions based on any or all of these emotions are inherently flawed, and often end up creating the very outcome that someone was trying to avoid.
- Change carries with it some risk: the risk of admitting that you're not perfect; that maybe you were wrong; that there was room for improvement. It demands knowing yourself: discovering both your flaws and your higher self.
- You have the capacity to defy everyday thinking and recreate yourself. I encourage you to explore your uncharted territory, just as you do in your work. Pursue your life with courage, imagination, and purpose. Pursue it with a vision, mission, and set of values that will take you where you want to go and encourage your employees to do the same. Life is a one-orbit trip. Make it count!

From *STICK TO IT!*:

"In the absence of
feedback
we make up
our own version
of reality."

—Leslie Charles

From
*WHY IS EVERYONE SO
CRANKY?*

"At the bedrock of our Anger Epidemic lies a compelling, complicating presence in our lives: The Expectation Machine, a conglomerate of illusions, impossible-to-deliver-promises, and erroneous beliefs that feed a highly fantasized version of The Perfect Life. Its fallout affects us both at an individual and societal level. Each of the last five decades brought with it a set of promises and expectations. While most of these promises were never realized, advertisements, media images, and intriguing illusions of futurists persistently fed our hope for a future far out of our grasp. Our cynicism rose, but so did our expectations. If you're thinking this makes no sense, you're right."

ILLUSIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND REALITY

*As our most "public" of government agencies, NASA not only offers the latest in leading edge science, technology, and research, it also taps into the collective of human potential; creating goals that seem like dreams, achieving them, and redefining our concept of "the impossible." Thanks to what we could call "the human condition," every NASA success raises expectations, and every failure erodes credibility, creating an ever-widening chasm between the two. **Ironically, the more you accomplish, the lower the public's tolerance for your errors.***

- The average citizen has a limited understanding of science, technology, and the scientific process. Therefore, they don't grasp, nor do they expect, that failure is an inevitable part of any scientific endeavor.
- The average citizen is unable to fathom the complexity of NASA projects, and consequently, when things go wrong, the only thing they know for sure is the end result. People are often unable to discover the "success points" in an outcome that appears to be a failure.
- The average citizen lives with constant money pressures and the astronomical cost of space exploration is daunting. Some fail to see the cost-versus-benefit ratio in something so remote to their daily lives and they resent the expenditure.
- The average citizen is driven by a blend of ego and insecurity. People typically operate more from their emotions than rational thought. Your message is subject to wildly fluctuating interpretations because when people can't grasp a situation they are likely to criticize, distort, or dismiss it.
- Given these aspects of our human nature, here are some points to keep in mind when you're trying to communicate your vision, whether within the confines of the campus, or to members of the public. Human beings are inclined to favor:

PEOPLE over places

IMAGE over issues

ENTERTAINMENT over education

ECONOMICS over explanation

PERSONAL NEEDS over collective needs

How can you use these concepts as a communication strategy when you're trying to make someone understand, comprehend, or embrace your ideas?

From *STICK TO IT!*:
“Life begins to get
a little easier
when we’re willing
to make hard choices.”
—Leslie Charles

MANAGING THE TEN TRENDS...

COMPRESSED TIME

SYMPTOMS: Chronic sense of time urgency; constant hurrying; sleep deprivation; speeding; rushing; rudeness; talking fast; hurrying others.

How time compression is affecting my operation:

COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD

SYMPTOMS: Fixation on news droppings/media trivia/ TV; discomfort with silence; inability to relax; massive "to do" pile; compulsive consumerism.

One way we can begin to relieve the chronic overload we all feel:

Dis-CONNECTEDNESS

SYMPTOMS: Preoccupation with work and self; distanced personal and work relationships; emotional withdrawal; loss of compassion; growing resentment. *One way I make sure my work team and I stay connected:*

COST CRANKINESS

SYMPTOMS: Constant money worries /conflicts; compulsive purchases, portfolio preoccupation; moments of frugality to extravagance; Lotto fantasies. *How personal money pressures can interfere with work performance:*

COMPETITION CLASHES

SYMPTOMS: Time, space, money, resource limitations; downsizing, job complications, fraying loyalties, status, and personal competitiveness. *Ways in which the pressures of competition are affecting my operation:*

From *STICK TO IT!*:
“The next time someone
pushes your buttons
remind yourself
that you're the one
who installed them.”
—Leslie Charles

CUSTOMER CONTACT CONFLICTS

SYMPTOMS: Big promises and small delivery; rudeness, indifference; incompetence; lack of common courtesy on both sides of the transaction.
One way we can support and practice service in our culture:

COMPUTER COMPLICATIONS

SYMPTOMS: Fear of technology to fixation with it; preoccupation with cyber activities; excessive dependence on machinery; physical and "emotional insulation" from the real world. *One way I can resist getting jaded:*

CHANGE CONSTERNATION

SYMPTOMS: Denial /refusal to acknowledge critical indicators; trivializing or demonizing "different" ideas; resistance to personal transformation.
One way I can keep myself open to inevitable organizational/personal change:

COMING OF AGE CRAMPS

SYMPTOMS: Preoccupation with youthfulness; self-consciousness about aging; poor health maintenance and self-neglect; giving up; losing vitality; burning out. *One way I can make age a positive force in my life:*

COMPLEXITY CRIMPS

SYMPTOMS: Overwhelm from option glut; frustration with social institutions; confusion over moral, ethical, political, and philosophical issues; feelings of letdown; disappointment.
One way we can simplify rather than complicate our work (life):

From *STICK TO IT!*:

"The message we most need to hear is the one we will most resist."

—Leslie Charles

ANTI-CRANKY COMMUNICATION TIPS

1. **Pace yourself.** Quit rushing, worrying, and hurrying yourself and others. Stop: LISTEN carefully and don't rush the person speaking.
2. **Help combat communication overload.** Don't interrupt others unless you have to. Give yourself a "quiet time" to get things done.
3. **Regularly revisit your priorities** (work and home) and commit to living in sync with them. Stay connected with your employees and keep them informed.
4. **Evaluate your spending/saving habits and live within your means.** Money problems can cause crankiness in the workplace. Remind yourself that there are nonmonetary costs attached to living an out of balance life: time, energy, relationships, and mental or physical health.
5. **Maintain good relationships at work and home.** Cooperate. Practice "people first, paper second." Cultivate patience so you don't fly off the handle when things go wrong (you're more effective when you "keep it all together.")
6. **Make service a part of your life.** Your job is to serve your employees and help them be effective. This makes it easier for them to make you look good.
7. **Develop your technology skills; use them prudently.** Don't let technology constantly interrupt your already fragmented time or that of others. Be unique: talk to people rather than sending e-mails all day.
8. **Embrace change rather than resist it.** Learn from every change you experience, whether it's forced on you or self-selected.
9. **Resist age bias.** Accept and learn from people of all ages.
10. **Reduce complexity.** Choose to simplify rather than complicate your life.
11. **Use shared meanings to prevent misunderstandings and cranky communication.** Just as there is power in shared values, there is power in shared meanings. It's helpful to constantly remind yourself that meanings are in *people*, not in words. Because everyone has their own definition of what a word might mean, you want to do all you can to help people understand what you're saying. When you say a word that can have multiple meanings (teamwork, communication, quality, leadership, etc.), *define what you mean* so others will be able to share your definition. Preempt your statement with one of the following phrases:

"By that I mean..." "For example..." "In other words..."

From
*WHY IS EVERYONE SO
CRANKY?*

"Creating the life you once only dreamed of takes work. But it's a gradual process and doesn't demand herculean effort. It only requires a series of small changes, consistently practiced over a period of time. You don't have to jump off a cliff or take a dramatic plunge. *You just need to put conscious thought into what you want and how you plan to make it happen.*"